

Biodiversity

This factsheet explores the issues of biodiversity and provides recommendations on how hotels can reduce their impact.

What is the issue?

Biodiversity describes the huge variety of life on Earth, made up of the millions of species of plants and animals, from large mammals, down to microscopic creatures like bacteria and fungi. All these species work together to create diverse habitats around the world, and provide us with many services, including the air we breathe, materials we use to build our homes and hotels, the food we eat, and the unique places guests travel to see.

Humans are having a growing impact on the planet, extracting and consuming the Earth's resources at an unsustainable rate. Practices such as land use, deforestation, overfishing, and pollution are threatening the stability of even our most remote ecosystems, and causing biodiversity loss at an alarming rate.

Why should hotels address this issue?

The travel and tourism industry has a significant impact on biodiversity, by¹:

- Releasing carbon emissions (from hotel operations and transportation to and from tourist destinations) which cause climate change.
- Changing land use for tourism purposes, such as hotels and tourist attractions.
- Exploiting and over-using nature, as both a tourism destination and a source of resources.
- Disturbing wildlife, including the introduction of invasive species.

Biodiversity can be a vital ally in the fight against climate change, through its ability to absorb emissions and provide a natural barrier against its effects (e.g. tropical storms and rising sea levels). The very survival of the tourism industry relies on the desirability of the unique and varied destinations in which hotels are based.



75%

of Earth's surface
altered by human
behaviour²



40,000

species threatened
with extinction³



3x more

coral damage and
disease at sites with
high tourist use⁴



Case study

To improve reef quality, **Hyatt Regency Maui** has installed stormwater management features and native vegetation that minimise the chance of stormwater flowing into the sea.

By reducing these flows and educating guests on things like sunscreen use, the resort hopes to minimise any potential impacts on the reef ecosystem.

The property also uses municipally treated greywater to irrigate portions of the property grounds to reduce the amount of clean water that would otherwise be used to irrigate landscaping.

How to get started

Identify important biodiversity considerations

Biodiversity covers a variety of factors, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to measuring or addressing it. The relevant biodiversity considerations for your hotel will vary significantly depending on your location and what you purchase.

For example, a hotel located near a tropical rainforest will have very different biodiversity considerations to one located in a large city, but a hotel located in a city could still have large impacts through their supply chain.

Questions to think about

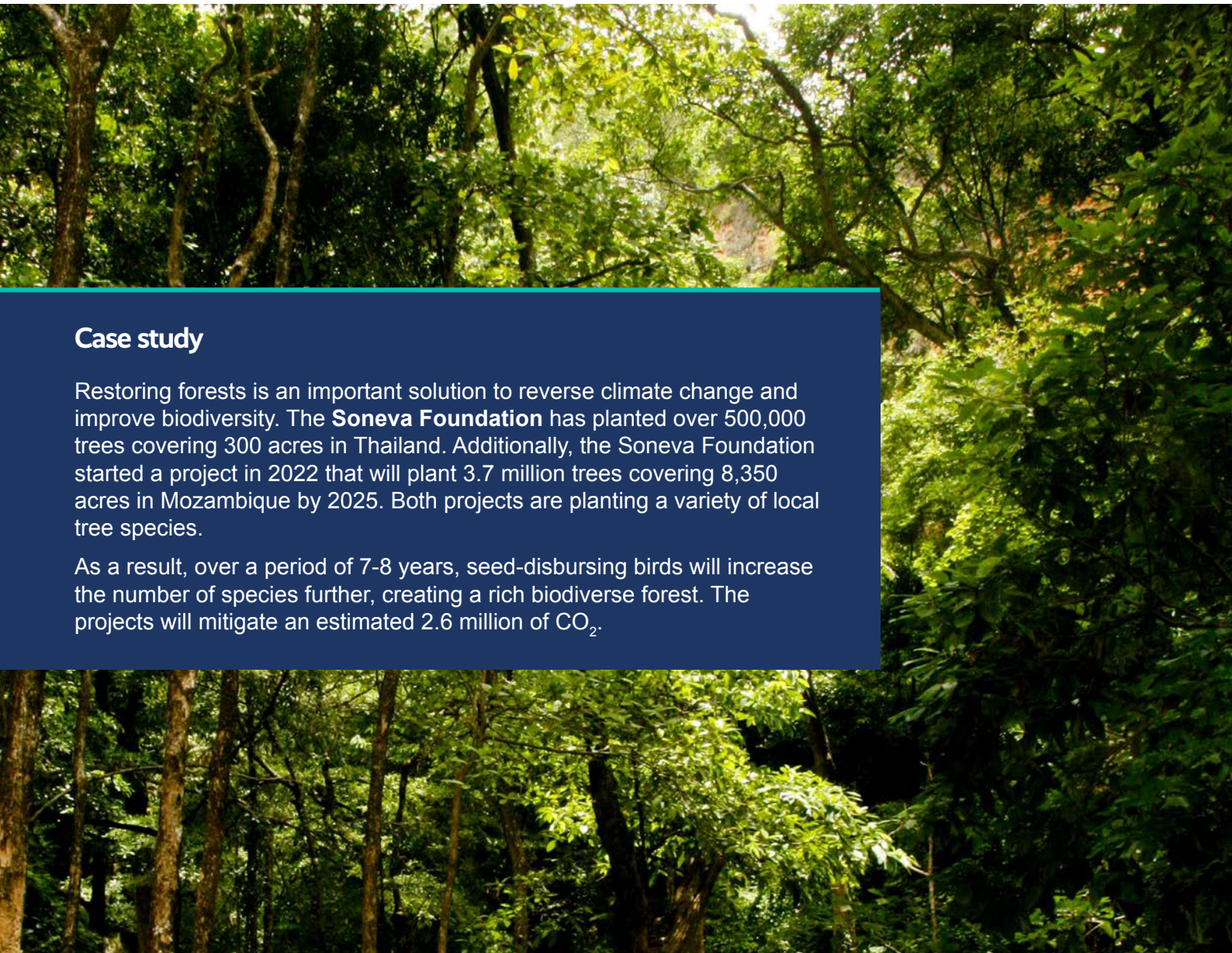
- What are the key products that you purchase (especially consumables like F&B, paper products and toiletries)? How could they have an impact?
- What are the key natural habitats in/around your hotel? E.g. coastal, forest, desert, urban green spaces.
- Which plant and animal species exist in proximity to your hotel? Are any of them endangered? (See the [IUCN Red List](#))
- What are the key impacts of climate change on the local area? How might these be impacting on biodiversity?

You can also reach out to local municipalities, wildlife groups and destination management organisations for their insight.

Case study

Restoring forests is an important solution to reverse climate change and improve biodiversity. The **Soneva Foundation** has planted over 500,000 trees covering 300 acres in Thailand. Additionally, the Soneva Foundation started a project in 2022 that will plant 3.7 million trees covering 8,350 acres in Mozambique by 2025. Both projects are planting a variety of local tree species.

As a result, over a period of 7-8 years, seed-disbursing birds will increase the number of species further, creating a rich biodiverse forest. The projects will mitigate an estimated 2.6 million of CO₂.



Understand your impacts

After identifying which biodiversity considerations are most relevant, you should then think about the impact your hotel is having. The following list offers some key areas for consideration:



1. Generation of greenhouse gases

Greenhouse gases including carbon dioxide are produced through activities such as transportation (including deliveries from suppliers), energy production and consumption, cooking, and waste. These gases contribute to global warming, by trapping and amplifying heat from the sun, and can have drastic impacts on local biodiversity over time.



2. Water usage

In some locations, the typical hotel guest uses over eight times more water than those in the local community.⁵ Hotel amenities including swimming pools and spas, laundry and F&B typically require large amounts of water.



3. Waste generation

Solid waste includes non-recyclable waste (sent to landfill or incineration), recyclable waste (sent to a recycling plant), and compostable waste (composted). Liquid waste includes blackwater (sewage) and greywater (from taps and showers). You should also consider items which are incorrectly disposed of (e.g. through littering, or recyclable materials which are not recycled).



4. Supply chain

Beyond your direct operations, it is important to recognise the biodiversity implications of your supply chain. The production of some commodities can have drastic impacts on the natural world (e.g. paper and timber products, seafood and items containing palm oil).



5. Use of land and resources

This includes the land cleared for the construction or expansion of a hotel, and the resources used or removed as part of hotel maintenance (for example: manicured gardens and beaches, removal of native trees, water for swimming pools, etc.).



6. Potential disruption to wild species and their habitats

Disruption might be caused by human proximity and footfall, littering and waste production, and noise and light pollution. For example, the large number of tourist vehicles visiting the Maasai Mara in Kenya have resulted in a dramatic decline in the number of cheetahs able to raise their young.⁶



7. Diversion or degradation of natural water sources

Infrastructure such as buildings, cement or tarmac can divert natural passages of water, disrupting natural habitats and communities. Some hotel practices also affect the purity of water sources (e.g. through use of harmful chemicals and cleaning products, or improper waste disposal).

Take action

There are various actions you can take to start addressing biodiversity.

- **Wildlife friendly areas** – prioritise planting native species or allow the re-wilding of areas on your property. Consider installing a green wall, rooftop garden, or wildlife pond.
- **Chemicals use** – switch to certified eco-friendly chemicals and cleaning products where possible.
- **Purchasing** – purchase products with a reputable [certification](#), such as [FSC](#), [Rainforest Alliance](#), or [ASC](#). Ban the use or sale of endangered or non-sustainable species throughout your operations.
- **Plastic** – set up initiatives to reduce the use of [single use plastics](#) in your property. Ensure there is clear messaging and sufficient waste bins to discourage littering and incorrect waste disposal.
- **Energy/carbon reduction** – reducing your energy consumption and/or carbon production will help to reduce the impacts climate change could have on biodiversity.
- **Support local initiatives** – team up with local conservation organisations and community groups to support their efforts.

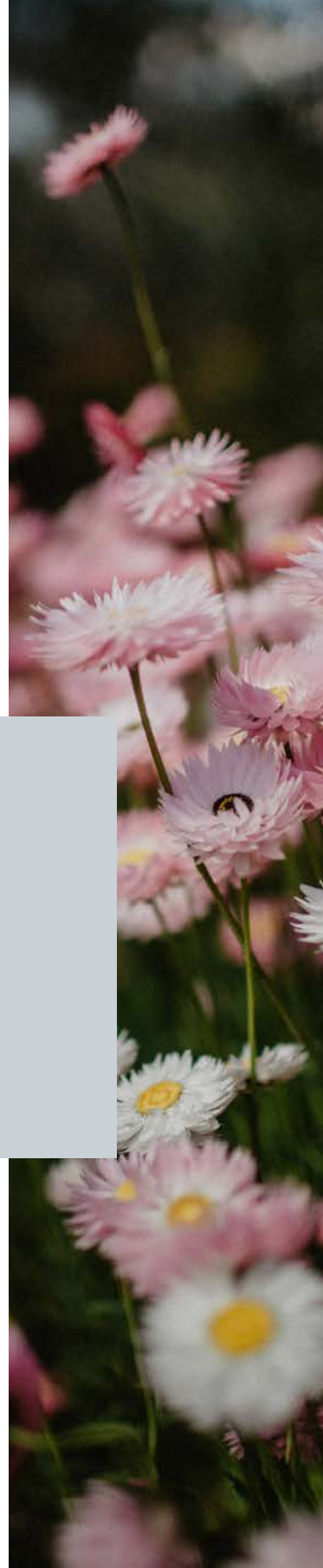


Communications

Letting your customers know what you are doing to address the issue of biodiversity is almost as important as taking action.

Your communications should include what you are doing, what your achievements have been and how you are addressing some of the bigger, longer-term issues.

A good start is to map your efforts against the UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#). There may not always be a specific goal for the exact issue you are addressing but the goals most related to biodiversity efforts are SDG 12, 13, 14 and 15.



Tools and resources

- [Get Nature Positive](#) offers a clear introduction to the impacts of tourism on nature, and provides a series of practical actions to address different biodiversity challenges.
- The [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) has country profiles which include links to national plans, information about areas of high biodiversity importance and the main threats to biodiversity in country.
- Our [Responsible Procurement factsheet](#) explores how responsible purchasing can positively impact hotel operations and includes tips on how to get started.

1. World Tourism Organization (2010), [Tourism and Biodiversity – Achieving Common Goals Towards Sustainability](#)
2. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2022), [Biodiversity](#)
3. IUCN (2022), [Red List of Threatened Species](#)
4. J. Lamb, J. True, S. Piromvaragorn, B. Willis (2014), [Scuba diving damage and intensity of tourist activities increases coral disease prevalence](#)
5. Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (2018), [Water Stewardship for Hotel Companies](#)
6. D. Simpson (2018), [Wildlife tourists decrease breeding success in Kenya's cheetahs](#)

About Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

Sustainable Hospitality Alliance brings together engaged hospitality companies and uses the collective power of the industry to address key challenges affecting our planet and its people.

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